

# **Christian Education**

## **Heaven, Education, and Eternal Learning**

Lesson #13 for December 26, 2020

Scriptures: John 3:16; 1 John 5:13; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 13:12; Zechariah 13:6.

1. What happens to a person after s/he dies? Who has the ability to tell us the truth about that? Only God has information about the afterlife.

A poet, fearful of death, asked about how a person could live without “knowing for sure what dawn, what death, what doom, awaited consciousness beyond the tomb?” He created in his poem what he called the IPH, the Institute of Preparation for the Hereafter. Yet, how can one prepare for the hereafter if one doesn’t even know what happens to a person in it?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sabbath afternoon, December 19.

2. So often, our lives are so consumed with the urgent that we do not have time to think about the important! The schools of today have such a challenge because the amount of knowledge that is available is beyond the grasp of any one human. We try to cram as much as possible into our education. Are we forgetting what is most important of all?
3. Blaze Pascal, a French writer and philosopher, was thinking about the state of humanity. After deliberating with himself for some time, he said there is one point which is very clear:

No matter how long a human being lived (and back then they didn’t live all that long), and no matter how good that person’s life was (and life wasn’t all that great back then either), sooner or later that person was going to die.

Moreover, whatever came after death was going to be longer, infinitely longer, than the short span of life here that preceded death. Thus, for Pascal, the most logical thing a person could or should find out is what fate awaits the dead, and he was astonished to see people get all worked up over things such as “loss of office, or for some imaginary insult to his honor,” yet they paid no heed to the question of what happened after they were to die.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, December 20.

4. So, where can we look for an accurate description of what happens after we die? Only the Bible with its inspired records can make that clear.

**John 3:16:** “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., John 3:16). New York: American Bible Society.

**John 17:3:** “And eternal life means knowing you, the only true God, and knowing Jesus Christ, whom you sent.”—*Good News Bible.\**

**1 John 5:13:** I am writing this to you so that you may know that you have eternal life—you that believe in the Son of God.—*Good News Bible.\**

**1 Timothy 1:16:** But God was merciful to me in order that Christ Jesus might show his full patience in dealing with me, the worst of sinners, as an example for all those who would later believe in him and receive eternal life.—*Good News Bible.\**

**John 4:14:** “But whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

**John 6:40:** “For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life. And I will raise them to life on the last day.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Jude 1:21:** And keep yourselves in the love of God, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy to give you eternal life.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Titus 3:7:** So that by his grace we might be put right with God and come into possession of the eternal life we hope for.—*Good News Bible*.\*

5. **There was no reason for Christ to come the first time if He is not planning to come back! That is why there are so many clear promises in the New Testament about what is coming beyond death. God does not intend to allow the evil we live with today to continue indefinitely.**
6. But, Christians, and especially Seventh-day Adventist Christians, have a real challenge in trying to convince an apathetic world that they need to give thought to the future life.
7. So, what can we expect in that future life?

**Revelation 21:4:** “He [God] will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†

8. So, we cannot extrapolate from all the bad things which are happening in this world today to understand what is going to happen throughout eternity.
9. Have you ever tried to talk to a non-Christian friend and explain to him your beliefs about eternal life? Sometimes, such people respond by saying: “Why would you want to have any more time in a world like this?” Or, “There is nothing beyond this life; so, live it up.”
10. But, the new heavens and the new earth we are planning to occupy will be completely different from where and how we are living now.

**2 Peter 3:10-13:** <sup>10</sup> But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that Day the heavens will disappear with a shrill noise, the heavenly bodies will burn up and be destroyed, and the earth with everything in it will vanish. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people should you be? Your lives should be holy and dedicated to God, <sup>12</sup> as you wait for the Day of God and do your best to make it come soon—the Day when the heavens will burn up and be destroyed, and the heavenly bodies will be melted by the heat. <sup>13</sup> But we wait for what God has promised: new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will be at home.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Revelation 21:1-6:** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. <sup>3</sup> I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: “Now God’s home is with human beings! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There

will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.”

<sup>5</sup> Then the one who sits on the throne said, “And now I make all things new!” He also said to me, “Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted.” <sup>6</sup>And he said, “It is done! I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty I will give the right to drink from the spring of the water of life without paying for it.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

11. Shouldn't the most important question in our lives be about how we can be a part of that new world? If we really understood it, would we allow anything to stand in the way of our being there?

**Heaven is a school; its field of study, the universe; its teacher, the Infinite One. A branch of this school was established in Eden; and, the plan of redemption accomplished, education will again be taken up in the Eden school.**—Ellen G. White, *Education*\* 301.1.†

12. Think of the awful things which are a daily part of our world today: Sin, suffering, sickness, death, and all sorts of tragedies from hurricanes to fires to floods to earthquakes to pandemics, etc. **Why is it necessary for us to go through all of this sorrow, pain, and suffering—even losing family members and friends—to prepare us for living in a world where there will be no death, no crying, no trouble?**
13. When someone who takes this world seriously looks at all the mysteries from the microscopic to the astronomical that need to be studied still further, can we even grasp all there is to learn? The Bible has a few words to say about that.

**1 Corinthians 13:12:** What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete—as complete as God's knowledge of me.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**1 Corinthians 4:5:** So you should not pass judgement on anyone before the right time comes. Final judgement must wait until the Lord comes; he will bring to light the dark secrets and expose the hidden purposes of people's minds. And then all will receive from God the praise they deserve.—*Good News Bible*.\*

14. Imagine living in a world where God is present and every question will have an accurate and good answer. When I began medical school about 50 years ago, our dean stood up and said on the first day of classes: “One half of what we are going to teach you is wrong; but, we just don't know which half!”
15. Heaven will not be like that. But, God is not just going to tell us the answers to every question. He is going to challenge us to investigate for ourselves. That will be an eternal journey of discovery. Are there any serious questions that you have which weigh on your heart and mind? Are there things that seem completely incomprehensible? When you think about how God has helped us with the things that we do understand, doesn't that give us faith to trust Him in what we do not yet understand?

Some among the redeemed will have laid hold of Christ in the last hours of life, and in heaven instruction will be given to those who, when they died, did not understand perfectly the plan of salvation. Christ will lead the redeemed ones beside the river of life, and will open to them that which while on this earth they could not understand.—Undated Manuscript 150.—Ellen G. White,

16. So, what do we know about that future school in heaven? We know that there are a lot of things that are real but which are unseen in this world. As a brief example, we cannot see God or Satan or angels. But, in that future world, all of those will be visible. The prophet John saw some of it, and this is what he said:

**Revelation 21:1-2:** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband.—*Good News Bible.\**

**Revelation 2:7:** “If you have ears, then, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches!

“To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit of the tree of life that grows in the Garden of God.”—*Good News Bible.\**

**Revelation 7:14-17:** <sup>14</sup> “I don’t know, sir. You do,” I answered.

He said to me, “These are the people who have come safely through the terrible persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup>That is why they stand before God’s throne and serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will protect them with his presence. <sup>16</sup>Never again will they hunger or thirst; neither sun nor any scorching heat will burn them, <sup>17</sup>because the Lamb, who is in the centre of the throne, will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”—*Good News Bible.\**

17. But, let us be honest. We only have the barest minimum of hints, even glimpses, of what is going to come. However, we know that all the evils that beset us in this world will be gone.

There, when the veil that darkens our vision shall be removed, and our eyes shall behold that world of beauty of which we now catch glimpses through the microscope; when we look on the glories of the heavens, now scanned afar through the telescope; when, the blight of sin removed, the whole earth shall appear in “the beauty of the Lord our God,” what a field will be open to our study! There the student of science may read the records of creation and discern no reminders of the law of evil. He may listen to the music of nature’s voices and detect no note of wailing or undertone of sorrow. In all created things he may trace one handwriting—in the vast universe behold “God’s name writ large,” and not in earth or sea or sky one sign of ill remaining.—Ellen G. White, *Education\** 303.4.

18. Try to imagine what that would be like in the new earth to see, for example, a sunset in the evening. What things do you especially look forward to see and do in the earth made new?
19. One of the most exciting things about that new earth is the One who will be the Teacher.
20. Jesus was always teaching. He took advantage of every opportunity that presented itself.

**Matthew 5:2:** And he began to teach them....—*Good News Bible.\**

**Mark 4:2:** He used parables to teach them many things, saying to them....—*Good News Bible.\**

**Luke 19:47:** Every day Jesus taught in the Temple. The chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the leaders of the people wanted to kill him.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**John 6:59:** Jesus said this as he taught in the synagogue in Capernaum.—*Good News Bible*.\*

21. Notice, once again, what Jesus's main theme for teaching was.

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and **God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary.** He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. **Jesus came to teach men of the Father,** to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. **The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes....**

**Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, “I have manifested thy name.” “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men. *The Signs of the Times*,\* January 20, 1890, par. 6,9.†**

22. **Think of the incredible implications of this statement! “The only way,” “The whole purpose,” “His work was accomplished,” etc. These are words describing the life of Jesus Christ on this earth and His mission. But, if one does not understand the real issues involved in the great controversy, this passage does not make sense. Is that why this statement is not repeated anywhere in any of Ellen White's major books or any of her subsequent publications or compilations? Why hasn't the Seventh-day Adventist Church published this statement across the world along with extensive explanations as to why it is true? Is it possible that our church has not really understood Ellen White's explanation of the great controversy?**
23. If you scan over any portion of any of the Gospels, you will find that Jesus was continuously teaching. Are we ready to enroll in that “university” where there will be no graduation? Try to imagine a school where there are exciting new things to learn every day.
24. One friend and scholar has suggested that each Sabbath when we come together to worship in the new earth, we will be so excited to tell about something that we have discovered. When we speak about it to an angel or even to God Himself, we will say: “Look at this and this and this which we learned this last week.” Those wonderful heavenly beings will turn to us and say: “Okay, why don't you try investigating this new subject next week?” And that will lead us into another wonderful world of discovery. But, one of the things that will occupy much of our time is thinking about all that God has accomplished through the

plan of salvation.

**Zechariah 13:6:** And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.—*King James Version*.\*

**That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven.** The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.... **The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden....** The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides **an eternal safeguard** against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,\* December 30, 1889, par. 4.† Compare *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, 1132.8,9; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7a, 476.3; *Our High Calling* 45.4.

25. What do you think Ellen White was talking about in this next section?

The years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. **As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character.** As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise....

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*\* 678.1-3.†

26. Take a few minutes and read that final, incredible chapter in *The Great Controversy* entitled “The Controversy Ended.”

The lion, we should much dread and fear here, will then lie down with the lamb, and everything in the New Earth will be peace and harmony. The trees of the New Earth will be straight and lofty, without deformity....

Let all that is beautiful in our earthly home remind us of the crystal river and green fields, the waving trees and the living fountains, the shining city and the white-robed singers, of our heavenly home—that world of beauty which no artist can picture and no mortal tongue describe. **Let your imagination picture the home of the saved, and remember that it will be more glorious than your brightest imagination can portray.**—Ellen G. White,

*Maranatha\** 355.4-6; *Heaven\** 133.1-134.0.†

A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father's house. Those who accept the teachings of God's word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode.... Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. **No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy\** 674.4-675.0.†

27. Some might worry that, eventually, heaven will become boring because we will have discovered everything there is to know! Even in this world, the fields of biology, geology, astronomy, physics, chemistry, etc. have so many things to learn. Every time we discover something new, it opens up new fields to learn. Scientists now know that there are no “simple life-forms”; even the simplest cell is incredibly complex. So, there will be no lack of information or opportunities for study in the school of the hereafter. But, how can so many people in this world live as if there is no hereafter? Is it because they do not believe there is any way to know what really is going to happen? Jesus warned us in Mark 8:36 (*GNB\**): “Do people gain anything if they win the whole world but lose their life? Of course not!”
28. Jesus spent much of His time on this earth trying to get people to realize all the errors about God they were believing and to turn their minds to the truth about Him. **Learning about God will be an eternal study.** There will be no disappointments, no boredom, no apathy. The common view that we are going to be floating around on clouds, playing some kind of ethereal harps, is completely erroneous.

The glories that await those redeemed from the earth cannot be exaggerated. First, there is the absence of pain in all its forms: no crying, no sorrow, no death (*Rev. 21:4*). There will be no future source of sorrow, because He who sits on the throne says, “Behold, I make all things new” (*Rev. 21:5*). Sin is the root of suffering, and every part of it is kept out of the precinct of the redeemed (*Rev. 21:8*). Second, all our past sufferings are consoled, since God Himself will have “wipe[d] away all tears from [our] eyes” (*Rev. 21:4*). We will be “kings and priests unto God” (*Rev. 1:6*) with the undeserved and staggering privilege of sitting with Him on His throne (*Rev. 3:21*). One can only imagine the heights of worship and praise that will flow uncontrollably from hearts overflowing with gratitude for what God and the Lamb have done for us. Can you see us joining the 24 elders and casting our crowns before His feet (*Rev. 4:10*)? How can words adequately describe such a scene?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 171-172.§  
[Brackets and the content in brackets are in the *Bible Study Guide*.]‡

29. But, our greatest study throughout eternity will be God Himself and all that He has done and all that He will do for us.
30. “Abraham Heschel shares, ‘Never once in my life did I ask God for success or wisdom or power or fame. I asked for wonder, and [H]e gave it to me.’”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 172. [Brackets and the letter in brackets are in the source.]‡
31. Is it possible that we were hardwired for the purpose of learning about God?
- C. S. Lewis mused: “God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the

fuel our spirits were designed to burn.”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 172.

32. Can you remember a time when you were excited about learning? Children sometimes show that intense excitement. They might even say: “Wow! What is that? How is it happening? Why is it like that? What can we do with that?”
33. The mystery of God will be our eternal study. In the Bible, mystery is not something impossible to learn, but rather, something that only those who have been educated about it understand.
34. Consider this.

Another text that is often used to highlight the unimaginable glories of heaven is, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

This text has thrilled many with the anticipation of how amazing heaven will be. However, the specific context of this verse does *not* support the idea (1) that no one has seen what is being talked about and (2) that heaven is primarily what is referred to as that which God has prepared. First, the very next phrase after the text in question is “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.” So, that which hadn’t been “seen” or “heard” has now been revealed to Paul and company through the Spirit. Is this speaking of Paul’s receiving a preview of heaven? Not likely. The verses before our text are speaking of the “wisdom of God” hidden in a “mystery.” This mystery is tied to the opening thought of the chapter, which speaks of “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” A quick phrase search for “wisdom of God” and “mystery” in Paul’s epistles makes it apparent what Paul is speaking about when he says “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.” He is speaking of the gospel of a crucified Christ and its magnificent results (Eph. 1:9, 10; Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26, 27; Col. 4:3; Eph. 3:10, 11). The more contextualized understanding of this famous text doesn’t take away from the glories of heaven. It adds to the glory of knowing God and His purposes as seen in Jesus the Christ and says we can experience these glories *now* through the Spirit. This is our “heaven”-on-earth experience.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 173.<sup>§</sup>

35. Stretched out before us in eternity, we have either all of these opportunities that we have talked about or eternal nonexistence. And we have a choice. Will we choose God’s loving side and live the good life? Or, will we choose to be selfish like Satan was and cease to exist?
36. Every morning as we arise, would it be appropriate for us to choose God’s side? Might you say: “Today I choose to walk with God,” or “I choose to be a disciple of Christ and learn all I can from Him”? Might you choose to see and treat others the way Jesus did? Would you even dare to choose the satisfying joy of holiness over the fleeting pleasures of sin? Surely, we would choose eternal life over eternal death. Are we prepared to let Jesus make a new creation out of us?
37. Are we prepared to begin that education that will continue forever?

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